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INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000527

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. HILL
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/20/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM KDEM ZI
SUBJECT: SCARCITY OF MDC POLLING AGENTS BODES ILL FOR
ELECTION

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4(d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Recently elected Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) MP from Gutu South, Eliphas Mukonoweshuro, called on poloff to request help financing burial arrangements and coffins for six MDC activists who were killed recently in his constituency. He related that SADC and Pan African Parliament (PAP) observers were now present in Gutu South and they were able to prevent and witness violence, but only to a limited extent. Gutu South had been wracked by violence, and the MP estimated the MDC will only be able to provide MDC polling agents for about one-fifth of the polling places in his constituency -- despite the fact that the constituency voted MDC in the first round. He admitted he was praying for a miracle in the June 27 presidential runoff. END SUMMARY.

MDC struggling to bury the dead

¶2. (C) On June 20, MDC MP Eliphas Mukonoweshuro, the MDC's shadow foreign minister, called on poloff to report on the violence in his constituency and request help burying six recent victims. His victory in Gutu South in Masvingo province on March 29 marked the first MP win since 1980 for a non-ZANU candidate. He reported MDC's wide margin of victory over former Youth and Gender minister Shuvai Mahova had unleashed a violent response by ZANU-PF and colluding military officials. (NOTE: In Gutu South Mukonoweshuro received 51 percent in the three-way MP contest between the two MDC factions and ZANU-PF; Tsvangirai received 62 percent of the presidential vote. END NOTE.) He named the five active duty military officials responsible for the violence in Gutu South: Colonel Gangata, Colonel Masanganise, Major Magumise, Colonel Ushe, and Colonel Chasana, retired Major Madombwe (losing MP Mahova's husband). According to Mukonoweshuro, Major General Englebert Rugeje was

orchestrating the violence throughout Masvingo province.

¶3. (SBU) Mukonoweshuro said that right now there were six bodies of MDC supporters whose families could not afford coffins and burials. He added that in most constituencies, MDC officials had been helping to pay for burials from their own pockets, but since Gutu South had been so hard hit with violence, he could no longer afford to continue helping his constituents.

Can't campaign; too busy burying victims

¶4. (C) As violence and fear have taken over, the MDC's ability to recruit, train, and mobilize polling agents has been eliminated. "We should be working on getting polling agents, but we can't because we're burying people," he reported. MDC plans to move agents from urban to rural areas had been scrapped because it would be too resource intensive, and because non-local agents "wouldn't know which hill to run to" in the event of violence. For his on constituency, which has 43 polling stations, h believed the MDC would have just 8 polling agent -- only at the places near the road where they ould more easily escape or be picked up in the eent of violence or intimidation. Mukonoweshuro sad polling agents from the March 29 election had een threatened with death or destruction of theirhomes if they worked as polling agents again on une 27. Nonetheless, he remained optimistic that the MDC's urban vote would increase,

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providing some relief to ZANU attempts to rig the rural vote. He said that people were still determined and viewed the vote not as a democratic exercise, but as a kind of revenge against Mugabe. He admitted he was praying for a miracle.

Observers in Gutu providing some help

¶5. (C) Mukonoweshuro told poloff that some PAP observers were in Gutu South on June 18, and that some SADC observers had been in the area. Since their arrival, it has been easier to retrieve the wounded and bodies. However, there were not enough observers for the area. In addition, although they had helped prevent some violence, they had been slow to respond to imminent crises. On June 18, for example, a businessman was interrogated by four army officials. Observers were called to the scene but arrived two hours later, while the interrogation was still under way. Fortunately, the individual had not bee harmed; observers took him to the local police station and asked police to provide him with protection.

¶6. (C) Although observers are staying in hotels in Gutu, Mukonoweshuro feared they were spending too much time in town rather than in rural areas investigating the violence. Overall, they had been responsive to his requests and those of other MPs to investigate specific instances of violence and intimidation, even if their mobilization was slow. He believed that observers would be at constituency command centers for compilation of votes from different polling stations for counting on election night, but that their limited numbers would preclude presence at polling stations for vote tallying.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The violence escalated dramatically this week, with 14 confirmed deaths on Thursday June 19 alone, bringing the total to 85 killed since the March 29 election. The violence has had a chilling effect on the MDC's ability to campaign and mobilize. It is remarkable that the MDC -- which

convincingly won Gutu South on March 29 -- can only, according to Mukonoweshuro, mobilize polling agents for one-fifth of polling places in his constituency.

Mukonoweshuro's analysis, which strikes us as credible, runs counter to other MDC leaders who have assured us the MDC could field polling agents in all of the over 9,000 polling stations. With the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN) apparently limited to 500 observers, MDC polling agents in all polling stations are critical to any hope of a valid election result. If MDC agents are not present, we can expect rigging on a massive scale. END COMMENT.

Warren